

## Sound Stewards: The Art of Nurturing Our Super-Volunteers

Keywords: habitat, restoration, volunteers, stewardship, monitoring, partnerships

People For Puget Sound's habitat restoration projects focus on the need for quality monitoring and stewardship to ensure the environmental success of our sites. We've combined this important function with another key goal of the organization-- to involve the public in caring for Puget Sound and giving them a sense of ownership of our unique environment. We have two broad programs that encompass the majority of our restoration sites, the Community *Spartina* Stewardship program and the Sound Stewardship program.

The *Spartina* Stewardship program was developed in 2004 in response to the need for additional education and involvement of citizens in the battle to eradicate invasive *Spartina* from Puget Sound. The program functions in two methods; the first focuses on educating and involving shoreline property owners in the state-wide control effort led by Washington State Department of Agriculture. Property owners interested in a deeper involvement are trained to become stewards, and assist in monitoring control efficacy on their properties. The second method engages the general public and aids in the overall reduction of *Spartina* in the Sound through restoration 'dig events' that physically remove the invasive from the marine habitat.

The Sound Stewardship program was created out of a need for the ongoing stewardship of our multiple restoration sites with limited staff resources. We hold annual trainings to empower citizens as steward 'site leads' and provide them with a support network and the resources needed to effectively manage restoration sites. We regularly have restoration events at our sites throughout the year to involve the general public. The program operates on both public and private lands and we collaborate with multiple agencies and organizations to streamline collective stewardship efforts.

The first step of establishing stewards, or super volunteers, is through targeted outreach. The *Spartina* program primarily targets property owners known to have the invasive on their beach. We work to initially involve the whole community, and from there recruit those interested in a larger commitment to the program. The Sound Stewardship program outreaches to the general public and the communities neighboring our restoration sites. We advocate the need for dedicated stewards and often recruit during large restoration events. In addition, we utilize partnerships with other organizations such as the Washington Native Plant Society who require service hours in exchange for training, but do not have established sites of their own.

The second step is to instill knowledge and confidence. We provide personal training that covers our monitoring protocols, plant identification, site histories and basic habitat restoration processes. We provide manuals to use in the field and house a large library of additional resources available to stewards. We connect them with local experts where applicable and are working to build our online resources into a useful volunteer tool. In addition, our programs create a strong sense of connection to community, even when a formal community does not exist. For example, many of our restoration sites are along the highly industrialized Duwamish River where communities are fragmented and the city of Seattle itself is disconnected from its hometown estuary. Both of our programs allow communities to form and strengthen around specific sites and issues.

The third element is promoting long-term commitment from stewards. This is accomplished through fostering connection to the site and a dedication to its well-being. Communication is also essential to both the function of the program and the enthusiasm of the stewards. We regularly discuss the sites' progress and needs with the steward and facilitate any necessary actions, such as weeding parties, additional plantings, and removal of invasives. Our stewards have access to other opportunities in our organization as well. Our new SEALS project provides volunteers with a basic training in our organization's functions and allows them to connect to other citizens through speaking engagements and staffing educational booths. The Speaker Series brings people together with local experts to discuss Puget Sound habitats and health issues. Shore Watch is an opportunity for neighbors to learn about the Sound's ecology together in a friendly and encouraging atmosphere.

In its first year, the *Spartina* program trained over 70 citizens in proper identification and manual removal methods of the invasive, educated over 60 private shoreline property owners on *Spartina*'s environmental impacts, and trained 11 private property owners as stewards to conduct monitoring. Volunteers collectively clocked 672 hours at eight sites in the North Sound.

The Sound Stewardship program has 65 stewards across eight sites on the Duwamish River in Seattle and two sites on Mud Bay in Olympia. Within the last year we have hosted 12 community restoration events on our sites and seven work parties that were entirely coordinated by volunteers for a total of 8000 volunteer hours.

Both programs actively seek out dedicated individuals looking for a special role in habitat protection and enhancement. We train these citizens in basic nearshore ecology, monitoring principals and protocols, and site maintenance. In return, they adopt sites throughout the Sound to care for, and commit to several months or years of continued stewardship. This approach supplies us with continuous feedback on the health and function of our restoration sites, imparts dedicated individuals with solid training, support, and a sense of ownership, and most importantly provides our restoration sites with the attention and nurturing they need to be successful.